

# Recruiting Minority Teachers

**As our student populations become more diverse, the teacher population is becoming less so. To reverse the serious decline in the number of teachers of color, educational leaders must understand the complex roots of the problem—and enact bold solutions.**

Schools form children's opinions about the larger society and their own futures. The race and background of their teachers tells them something about authority and power in contemporary America . . . [influencing] their attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. (Carnegie Task Force on Teaching As a Profession, 1986)

As pluralism increases, the teaching profession must reflect that diversity. It is essential for *all* teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and training to successfully teach diverse student populations. But it is equally important for *all* students to have the opportunity to be taught by teachers who reflect their diversity.

Thousands of members of diverse ethnic and racial groups have the ability, skills, and knowledge to be outstanding teachers—and we need them. Minority educators enhance our students' understanding of the intellectual, social, political, and economic complexity of our democratic society.

Today, there are approximately 52 million school-age students in the United States; by 2008, enrollments are predicted to reach 55 million (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996). Approximately 35 percent of our schoolchildren are from linguistic- or racial-minority families, and that figure is expected to increase 40 percent in less than a decade. We see this pluralism in many communities. For example, in one Northern Virginia elementary school, children speak 80 languages. Further, our student population is becoming more religiously diverse. And approximately 30 percent

of U.S. children come from families living in poverty.

At the same time, demographics within the teaching profession are moving in the opposite direction. Today, nearly 3 million teachers, counselors, and administrators work in our K-12 schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996, 1998). Of that number, only about 5 percent are from racially diverse groups, down from

12 percent in the 1960s (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1990). In addition, teaching is an aging profession. More than one-third of teachers in the United States are 50 or older (Recruiting New Teachers, 1998). Further, the attrition rate among new teachers entering the profession is alarmingly high. Twenty-five to 30 percent leave within

five years of entering the classroom. The projected growth in the size and diversity of the student population, an aging teaching profession, and high attrition rates all contribute to the serious need for new teachers. The parallel concern is ensuring that the teaching profession reflects our national diversity. Both are daunting challenges, but challenges that we must meet.

## A Complex Problem

When I entered the teaching profession in the early 1960s, teaching was one of the few careers open to African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Communities of color viewed teaching as a profession of status, especially for students who were the first in their family to go to college. Teaching was a way to contribute to the community and to make a difference in the lives of children who would define the future. It



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was also a way to earn a steady income—not to get rich, but to have economic stability.

Today, more students from minority groups are attending college. However, fewer students, including minorities, are pursuing teaching as a career. This decline reflects the decline in the enrollment of students in general in schools, colleges, or departments of education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1997), in 1971, 21 percent of all college students were enrolled in education programs. By 1994, that figure had dropped to 9 percent.

Equally alarming is the decline in the number of minority students enrolled in teacher education programs in historically black colleges and universities. Today, almost half of all African American teachers are graduates of such schools. These institutions of higher education lost 40 percent of their teacher education enrollment from 1977 to 1986 (Education Commission of the States, 1990). Colleges and universities were hurt by this loss, but the nation will experience a more negative impact. The essential question is, How do we reverse these trends and increase the number of teacher candidates, particularly members of minority groups?

We cannot explain why fewer minority students are pursuing teaching by simply citing demographics, however. The problem is more complex. For some, teaching is no longer an attractive profession. For others, teaching is not a profession, but a vocation with a rigid, bureaucratic hierarchy in which teachers are treated like tall children rather than like professionals. Unlike other professionals, teachers have little say about the decisions made in schools or how they will be implemented. Still other aspiring professionals realize that they can earn more money, prestige, and responsibility by becoming lawyers, doctors, and business leaders.

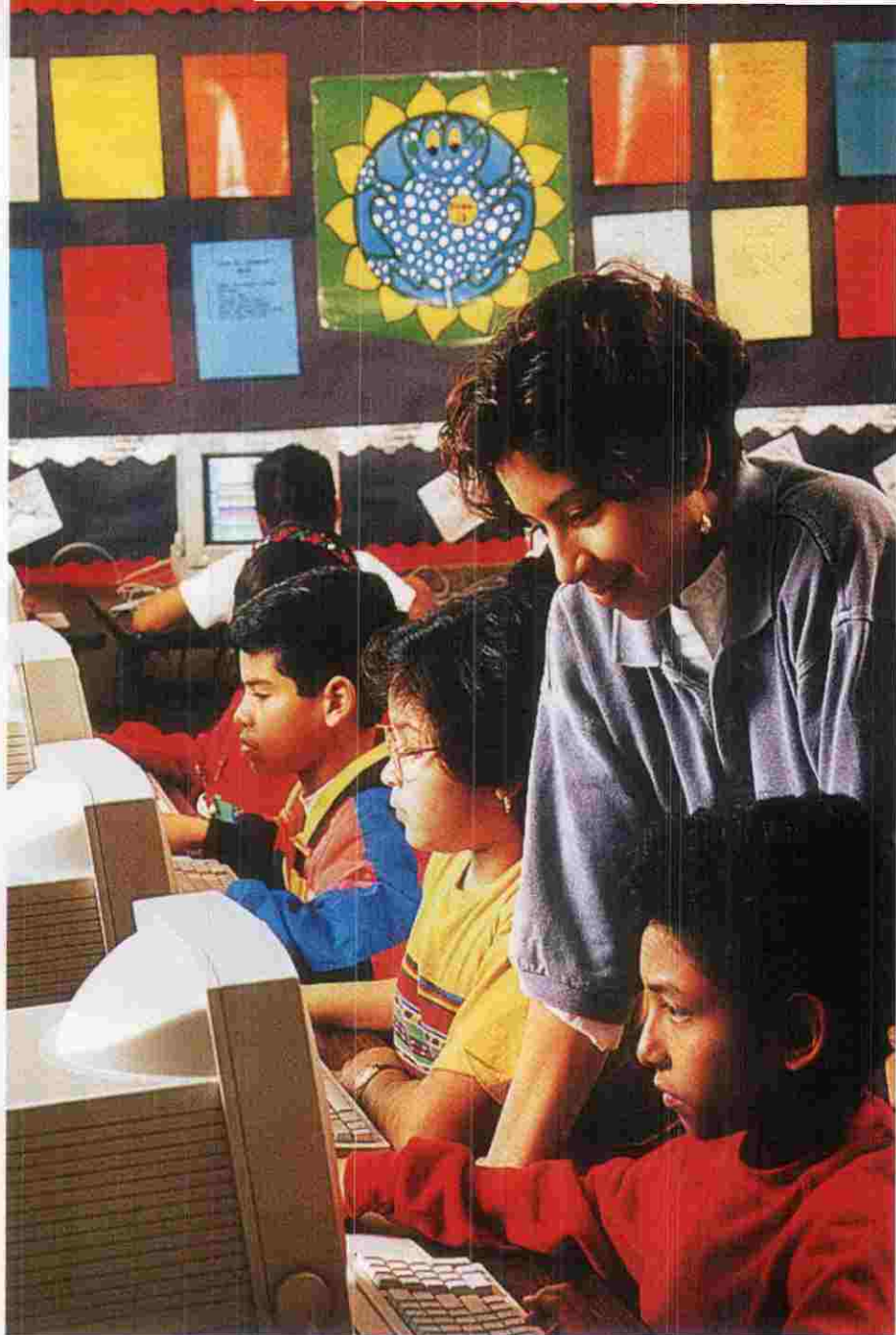
### **A Problem with Early Roots**

There are other, less frequently discussed reasons that minorities are not pursuing teaching as a career. One reason, which is deeply embedded in our education system, occurs long

before students begin thinking about going to college: lack of academic preparation. African Americans and Hispanics (many of whom are from poor families) are less likely to be placed in gifted and talented programs in elementary schools or in advanced placement programs in high schools. Although students from minority groups may be quite capable of succeeding in these programs, schools do not encourage them to do so. Just as African American and Hispanic students are overrepresented in vocational and special-education programs, they are underrepresented in advanced placement programs. In addition, these students are far more likely to be affected by the poverty of school programs and to

be taught by poorly prepared or noncertified teachers. Thus, minority students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are not acquiring the academic background, skills, and knowledge that are prerequisites to succeeding in college.

The implications of the failure of our schools to ensure quality learning opportunities are long-term. Key among these is the disparate impact on minority students of tests for entry into college and requirements to pass state and national tests for teacher licensure. Failure to pass such gatekeeper assessments can be traced to what these students did or did not study in elementary and secondary school. One of the issues before us is how to create and



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sustain a pool of candidates, especially students from minority groups, who can meet the new, more rigorous academic requirements of teacher preparation, licensure, and practice. As the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching As a Profession indicated more than a decade ago (1986),

the problem of minority teachers cannot possibly be solved without addressing the fundamental problems of minority educational preparation throughout the pipeline.

## Money Matters

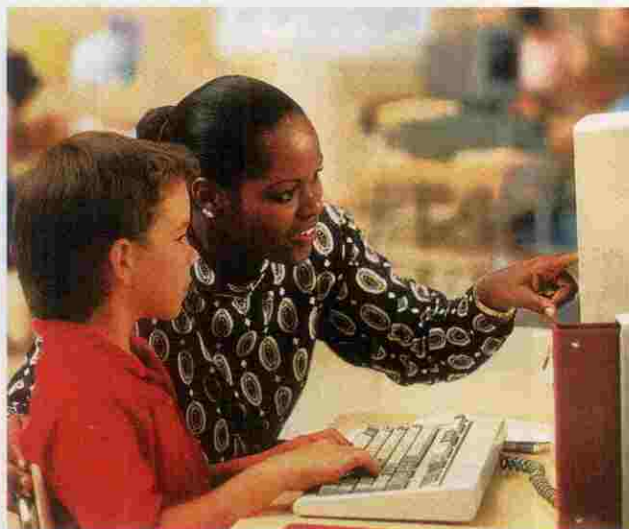
Another inhibition to minority students' becoming teachers is cost. Many students, including those from racial minority groups, question the cost of preparing to become a teacher, particularly when the return benefits are considerably below those of other professions. For many, the cost of a college education is prohibitive or will have a debilitating impact on their families. Because tuition rates are high, growing numbers of minority students lack the financial means to go to a four-year college or university. Upon graduation from high school, many of these students attend community or junior colleges because they are more accessible and less expensive. It is incumbent upon departments of education at four-year colleges and universities to partner with community and junior colleges to encourage students to transfer to their institutions and to select teaching as a career.

One way to help resolve the financial burden for minority students would be for federal and state governments to provide financial aid or forgiveness loans to students who are willing to make a commitment to teach at least one year for each year they receive financial assistance. That is how I received funds to pay my college tuition and graduated to become a career educator.

## Communicating the Need for Teachers

Another factor complicating the recruitment issue is the lack of information about the serious need for teachers,

especially in such areas as science, math, and bilingual education. Teacher shortages in these and other subjects vary across district boundaries. Further, the teacher shortage is particularly acute in our urban areas. Colleges and universities need to work more closely with local and state education agencies to identify critical areas of need and to prepare candidates, especially minority students, to meet these needs. And recruitment should focus on traditional and nontraditional groups of students. Marketing programs should target high



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school juniors and seniors, mid-career changers, teacher aides, and others who demonstrate a strong ability to become good teachers.

## Career Incentives

To persuade high-achieving students to select teaching as a career, we must consider incentives that will make teaching more rewarding professionally and financially. Professionalizing teaching also means treating teachers like professionals. In today's society, teachers are being held more and more accountable for decisions over which they have little, if any, control. This is particularly true regarding student achievement. Because teachers are the front-line implementers of most educational decisions, they must be involved at all levels of the decision-making process. They must also have working conditions that support quality teaching and learning. Equally important, all

teachers must have the necessary preparation and training to successfully implement education-reform initiatives.

A requisite to recruiting and retaining a diverse, highly qualified cadre of teachers is ensuring professional compensation. If the teaching profession is to compete with other professions for our most talented students, it must pay salaries commensurate with being a member of a profession. Today, the potential to earn a professional salary as a teacher is a decisive incentive.

## Strategies for Recruitment

Many complex factors keep qualified minority candidates from entering the teaching profession. Addressing these factors requires cooperation among university departments of education, school districts, and policymakers at all levels of government. The following strategies will help us recruit more minority teachers:

- Restructure teacher-preparation programs to ensure that a qualified teacher will be in every classroom and that the composition of the teaching profession reflects the diversity

that defines our nation. Schools of education should develop programs that will attract and prepare candidates from traditional and nontraditional fields to become teachers. Programs such as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are models for restructuring and enhancing the quality of teacher-preparation programs. Further, schools of education and schools of arts and sciences should work together to strengthen the content knowledge base of the specialty area (such as science, mathematics, English, or history) of teacher education candidates. Culturally responsive pedagogy should be integrated throughout all components of these preparation programs to ensure that prospective teachers have experiences determining effective teaching strategies for students.



■ Ensure that all students study a strong academic core curriculum beginning in the elementary grades. We must counsel students early and frequently about courses of study to prepare them to meet university academic expectations. We must encourage more students to study academic courses, develop good study habits, and learn good test-taking skills. And we must focus attention on the value of students' becoming teachers, counselors, and administrators.

■ Develop marketing and recruitment campaigns to attract more candidates, especially minority candidates, into teaching. Such campaigns should target school districts, colleges, and universities with high concentrations of minority students. For example, information sessions for potential teachers (including special groups such as sororities and fraternities, campus multicultural centers, and community-based

learn about campus life. The acclimation of students to campus life could include attending such activities as athletic events; seminars; special programs; summer institutes; and workshops to strengthen core academic knowledge, testing skills, and study habits. Participating in such activities before enrollment helps students understand what college life is like; enables them to adapt more effectively; and, possibly, increases their recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement rates.

■ Provide financial aid for students pursuing careers in teaching. Such programs could be created as forgiveness loans by crediting students with one year of repayment for each year they teach.

■ Develop mentoring programs with master teachers to provide stronger mentors for minority teacher candidates and novice teachers during their

zens. We also believe that education is inextricably linked to our national development. Education will be central to our future role as an economic and political power in an increasingly global society. And it is also essential to our efforts to ensure that the United States fulfills its mission of "E Pluribus Unum." Minority educators have a leading role to play in ensuring that as a nation, we achieve this goal. ■

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## Minority students must acquire the academic prerequisites for succeeding in college—and for becoming well-qualified teachers.

organizations) may yield a wealth of candidates. Personal contact between the program coordinator and minority students represents the key variable to successful recruitment. In making such contacts, a wide variety of staff should recruit candidates.

■ Design outreach programs to inform middle and high school students about the value of teaching and the need for teachers. Programs such as Future Teachers of America, Teacher Cadets, Grow a Teacher, and Future Educators of America give students opportunities to work with experienced teachers as interns, to set personal goals, and to develop leadership skills. These outreach programs should continue to make special efforts to recruit minority students as members.

■ Develop programs to bring minority students, especially those who are first-generation college students, to area college and university campuses to

practicum and the first year of induction into the profession.

■ Develop partnerships with school districts to identify minority students who can prepare to teach in areas where there are critical shortages, such as math, science, technology, and foreign languages.

■ Last, state and local education agencies should work to enhance the salaries and working conditions within teaching to make them more competitive with other professions.

By acknowledging the concern about the lack of diversity in the profession and collaborating with key stakeholders to develop creative strategies to address this issue, we can be more successful in our efforts to diversify the teaching profession—and to ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher.

The United States has always viewed education as essential to the development of responsible, productive citi-

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